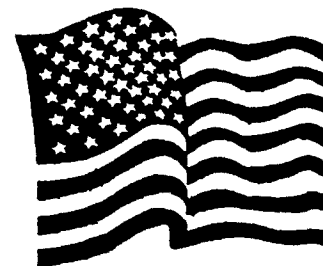


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PLUS TAX

Delay sought on water cleanup

Firms say discovery of toxic substance requires more study

By Laurence Darmiento
STAFF WRITER

BALDWIN PARK — Nearly a dozen companies believed to have contributed to the Valley's ground-water pollution are seeking a delay in developing a treatment plant, citing the discovery of a rocket fuel additive in the water this spring.

The companies, which plan to make a formal request today to the Environmental Protection Agency, contend that it would be futile to treat the existing solvent contamination prob-

lem without also eradicating a newly found chemical called perchlorate, which experts are not sure how to clean up.

The companies are seeking a delay of a year or longer while more studies are conducted on the health effects of perchlorate — which has been linked to thyroid disorders — as well as effective methods of removing it from water.

"To proceed now with the cleanup does not address all of the issues, and will not result in clean drinking water," said Huffy Corp. attorney David

Giannotti, a spokesman for a steering committee formed by the companies. "We would hope to reach an understanding with the EPA to delay the process until we undertake additional studies."

A chlorine derivative added to rocket fuel, fireworks and explosives, perchlorate was found in June at levels above state standards in wells south of Azusa operated by the La Puente Valley County Water District, Suburban Water Systems and the San Gabriel Valley

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THE CLEANUP DELAY

Nearly a dozen companies deemed responsible for polluting ground water in the Baldwin Park area want a yearlong delay in designing and building a cleanup plant.

■ **What's at issue:** Earlier this year tests conducted by state health officials found a chemical called perchlorate at levels above state standards. The companies say they need to study how to treat the contaminant, since the plant had been planned to treat other pollutants.

■ **What's perchlorate:** An additive to jet fuel, fireworks and explosives, the chemical inhibits the absorption of iodine by the thyroid gland and can lead to an enlarged thyroid. It also has been used to treat hyperactive thyroids in a medical setting. It may be fatal at very high doses. Its effect at low levels on infants and pregnant women is unknown.

CLEANUP

Fuel additive adds new wrinkle

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Water Co.

The contamination has caused the small La Puente district to shut down all its wells and buy more expensive water elsewhere. The other purveyors have either shut wells or blended the water with other sources to lower the concentrations of the contaminant to acceptable levels, officials said.

The discovery came as the EPA was moving forward with plans to build the single largest Superfund cleanup facility in the nation to treat chemicals known as volatile organics, used in degreasing and manufacturing.

The carcinogenic solvents were detected in 1979 and prompted water suppliers to shut some wells and build small treatment facilities. Despite the problems, all water sent to taps in the Valley meets state and federal health standards, officials say.

Two months ago, the EPA sent 19 companies it considers responsible for the solvent problem "special notices" formally starting the process to reach a consent decree, which outlines each company's legal

and financial responsibilities.

The treatment plant has been projected to cost \$45 million to build and \$4 million or more to operate annually for 30 years or longer.

The facility could be operational in three years or less.

A study prepared on perchlorate by the steering committee, which represents 10 of the potentially responsible companies and one other not formally notified, recommends a delay of up to 15 months while studies are conducted.

Wayne Praskins, the EPA's Baldwin Park project manager, said he had seen the study and the recommendations appeared reasonable, although no formal decision has been made.

The treatment plant, to be located on Ramona Boulevard at Auction Avenue, would treat the solvents with aeration and carbon filtration, but tests have shown those processes to be ineffective with perchlorate.

The state health department has only recently developed the ability to test for perchlorate in the relatively low levels found in Valley water.

Among the questions the health studies would seek to answer are the longterm effects at such levels, especially on infants and pregnant women. The thyroid gland produces hormones that regulate growth.

The perchlorate tests were conducted in the Valley in May by the state Department of

Health Services after tests in January found perchlorate in drinking-water wells near an Aerojet manufacturing plant in Sacramento.

Most of the contaminated wells have levels under 100 parts per billion. The state standard, set only this spring, is 18 parts per billion.

Aerojet, which has its other main plant in Azusa, maintains it's not responsible for the perchlorate contamination here, saying the local plant has not manufactured rocket engines for decades.

A member of the solvent steering committee, Aerojet says a World War II-era munitions manufacturer that operated on the same site during the 1940s may have been responsible for the perchlorate contamination.

Giannotti said despite the fact some believe Aerojet may be responsible for the latest pollution problem, the other companies on the steering committee are committed to developing a treatment plan cooperatively.

Among the 19 parties sent special notices by the EPA this spring for the solvent contamination are three Azusa companies not publicly identified earlier.

They are Azusa Pipe and Tube Bending, Phaostron Instruments & Electrical Co. and the Seidner Family Trust, a property owner, federal officials said.